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**Gushing Faucet Could Land Artist in Court**

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LONDON (AP) - Mark McGowan went into the tiny backroom kitchen of a south London gallery three weeks ago and flipped on the cold water. He didn't turn it off, and doesn't plan to for an entire year.

"The Running Tap," as it's called, is McGowan's effort to protest against wasted water in London by blatantly letting it go down the drain.

"When you've got the tap on at home, you don't think about it. That's why this is art, because it makes people consider it," the environmentalist said.

The gushing faucet is an expensive exhibition that could waste about 3.9 million gallons of water. It could also land McGowan in a legal battle with Thames Water, the utility company. The circular sink has already swallowed about 193,000 gallons of water during a season declared the driest in London since 1976.

The project has outraged Thames Water, which said it could cost about \$23,320 if the faucet runs for 365 days. The water company pleaded with McGowan to close the tap, but in vain.

"I think he certainly made a point," said Thames Water Spokeswoman Hilary Bennett. "We understand where he's coming from and we're sympathetic to that. However, he should turn it off now."

After two angry Londoners shut the tap off, McGowan turned it back on.

"If you're going to waste some water, you might as well waste it for a year," McGowan said. "It's always good to complete projects."

The biggest threat to McGowan's flowing form of art is a pipe ban, expected to be issued in August, which could force him and other Londoners to keep their taps turned off.

If necessary, Thames Water will prosecute McGowan under the Water Industry Act of 1991 for belligerently wasting the liquid. Thames Water isn't sure, however, exactly how to go about it.

"The legislation wasn't designed with this situation in mind," said Chris Shipway, Thames Water spokesman. "We're investigating the legal options and looking at what actions we can take against him."

McGowan previously participated in equally audacious exhibitions including sitting in a bathtub of baked beans with french fries in his nose to support the full English breakfast, and pushing a nut with his nose for seven miles to protest student debt.

The House Gallery is currently responsible for paying the water bill and has stood behind McGowan's artistic endeavors. Even so, they can't afford to pay for the tiny cascade that wastes about 9,200 gallons a day.

"The gallery probably couldn't foot the bill for an entire year," said volunteer Sarah McIntyre. "We're sort of taking a risk, because we're pretty poor."

McGowan said he hopes for a flood of donations to help keep the faucet flowing, but until then, the gallery is nervously awaiting the monthly bill.

"If it wasn't so serious, my art would be hysterical. But it's not, is it?" McGowan said of the grave consequences of wasting the precious liquid. "I think it's one of my best pieces because it's so simple."

The silver sink is the same basin that gallery volunteers use to make tea or wash a plate. The dish soap still sits nearby, ready for an after-lunch cleanup.

But just in case anyone forgets, a hand scrawled note taped just above the sink reads: "If you find the tap off please could you turn it on and leave it running. Thanks."

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